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ABSTRACT

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL), in cooperation with Laurentian University, convened a 2-day meeting of some 30 Canadian educators to ascertain through discussion and dialogue how best and to what purposes COL might cooperate with institutions and associations involved in distance education in Canada. This report summarizes six presentations that were featured the first day: (1) a keynote address by James A. Maraj, who explained the purposes of the meeting and the functions of COL; (2) Canadian perspectives on distance education by Ross Paul; (3) perspectives on distance education in Canadian universities by Marian Croft and in Canadian institutes and colleges by Tom Norton; (4) a talk on the use of telecommunications/technologies in distance education by John Quigley, which centered around educational telecommunications, educational broadcasting, educational technology, and communications technologies; (5) a discussion of material acquisition and development for distance education by Dennis Irvine, which included a number of challenges that COL faces in the-- --eas; and (6) information on three different distance education networks--Contact North (Gerard Lafrenier), the Telemedicine Centre (Ms. Erin Keough), and CREAD (Pierre Van Der Donckt). Reports by three groups that met on the second day to discuss and make recommendations to COL are then presented. These reports focused on: (1) materials for distance education; (2) the use of technologies and telecommunications in distance education; and (3) infrastructures for distance education. A summary of closing remarks concludes the report, and a list of meeting participants and an agenda for the meeting are attached. (BBM)

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Canadian Distance Educators Meeting

Sudbury, Ontario
CANADA

July 8-9, 1991

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Canadian Distance Educators Meeting

Sudbury, Ontario
CANADA

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Canadian Distance Educators Meeting

Background

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) was created by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their meeting in Vancouver in 1987, and established by means of a Memorandum of Understanding in September 1988. The organization became operational in January 1989 when the first President, Professor James A. Maraj, assumed office.

COL was established to create and widen access to opportunities for learning, especially in the developing countries of the Commonwealth, by promoting cooperation between universities, colleges and other educational institutions throughout the Commonwealth, making use of the potential offered by distance education and by the application of communication technologies to education. Through consultations and roundtable meetings, a number of COL-sponsored projects have evolved in different regions of the Commonwealth, aimed at developing and strengthening the capacities of countries to develop the human resources required for their economic and social development. The projects being carried out have helped to raise significantly COL's profile in the developing countries of the Commonwealth. By contrast, COL has tended to be relatively less known and understood in the industrialized countries of the Commonwealth, including Canada which is home to the organization.

Partly to redress this state of affairs, but more importantly to ascertain through discussion and dialogue how best and to what purposes COL might cooperate with institutions and associations involved in distance education in Canada COL, in cooperation with Laurentian University, convened a two-day meeting in Sudbury on July 8,9 to which some thirty Canadian educators were invited.

An overview of the meeting is presented below. The first day featured presentations and discussions. Day two was devoted to group discussions centred on three areas where the possibilities for collaboration were considered to be likely to be the most significant.

Presentations - Day 1

The meeting was officially opened by Ms. Marian Croft, Director, Centre for Continuing Education at Laurentian University. She welcomed the participants and introduced Dr. Ross Paul, President of the University and Professor James A. Maraj, President of COL.

Professor James A. Maraj

Professor Maraj presented the first keynote address of the meeting. He explained the purposes of the meeting and the delay in convening it, the main reason being that COL was established primarily to help developing countries and focusing on this issue has had to be a priority. He pointed out that the reality of what COL is and what it was actually set up to do are somewhat different from the original concept leading up to its establishment, and that some lingering perceptions of what COL should have been have, in some ways, tended to get in the way of COL "getting on with its job". He also explained that COL is an autonomous international organisation, that the members of COL are Commonwealth governments and that COL's priorities are therefore determined by them.

Professor Maraj noted that although COL is an advocate of distance education, it does not subscribe to the notion of distance education as being distinct and apart from conventional education. He explained that COL is concerned with human resource development and that although the use of distance education towards this end is part of its mandate, COL is not obliged to confine its activities within the narrow constraints of fixed distance education parameters. Distance education is an alternative strategy for expanding access to, and improving the quality of education and it is within that framework that COL has made use of it and will continue to do so.

Professor Maraj then went on to explain the internal structure of COL which was instituted along both geographical and functional lines, the functions being those which COL's Board had determined as priority areas. He concluded his remarks by stressing that Canada should be encouraged to take a more prominent role in the Commonwealth of the future, and that the continued strength of the Commonwealth may well be dependent upon Canada's taking a strong leadership role.

Dr. Ross Paul

In the second presentation, Dr. Paul addressed Canadian perspectives in distance education, and during it made a plea for open, honest sharing. At the same time, he cautioned against the tendency for overzealousness exhibited by some distance educators. He warned against confusing means with ends, again a tendency shown by some within distance education circles.

Dr. Paul ended his presentation with two important observations -- openness and pragmatism are essential to organisations like COL, and that although there may be a need to improve communication between COL and distance educators, the success of COL is critical to the health and survival of distance education, both in Canada and internationally.

Distance Education in Canadian Universities, Institutes and Colleges

The third presentation consisted of two participants providing perspectives on distance education in different types of Canadian educational institutions. Ms. Marian Croft spoke about distance education in Canadian universities and Mr. Tom Norton, President of the Association of Community Colleges of Canada (ACCC) provided an overview of distance education in Canadian institutes and colleges.

Ms. Croft reminded the audience that distance education was developed in Canada primarily to meet the needs of isolated students in rural areas, but, ironically, today serves mainly the urban communities. She described the continuing growth of distance education, particularly in professional programmes, and pointed out some of the obstacles that education through distance may encounter.

Ms. Croft concluded her talk by reiterating that collaboration was essential, between the institutions themselves; between institutions, industry and professional groups; and between COL and the organisations and institutions represented at the meeting.

Mr. Norton began his presentation by providing a brief description of colleges and institutes across Canada and the systems that exist within them. He indicated that by far the majority of distance education in these institutions is correspondence courses, the primary reason being that the same autonomy that exists at the university level does not exist in other institutions.

Mr. Norton summarised his discussion by suggesting the foci of Canadian distance educators should be cooperation and collaboration; research and development; the recognition of the shift from supply-driven to demand-driven education, including the delivery of skill-based education at the workplace; and meeting the challenge of creating a distance education culture within their institutions and in the context of their clients and constituents.

The Use of Telecommunications/Technologies in Distance Education

Mr. John Quigley, Director of Telecommunications and Technologies at COL, gave the next talk, which centred around the four major elements of the use of technologies in COL's programmes and activities, and how COL's mandate is achieved through these.

The first thrust identified was educational telecommunications. Mr. Quigley acknowledged that currently, for a number of reasons, few developing countries are using this technology -- the infrastructures to use it, and the support and maintenance capabilities are often not available locally, and both the capital and on-going costs may be high. COL's approach is to build on what is available locally, and to gradually expand existing networks as feasible.

Educational broadcasting, the use of broadcast facilities for the delivery of course materials over distance, was the second element discussed by Mr. Quigley. Again this is dependent on the facilities that are available in the local region and not widely used in many countries.

The third area of emphasis is the use of educational technologies, which encompasses a wide variety of technologies, including computers. Currently little use is made of these technologies to deliver courseware and much more to administer students and the institutions themselves.

The last element of COL's communications technologies plan is the use of technologies within COL headquarters, particularly for communication purposes. Pointing to the high costs in terms of both time and money for meetings, particularly if the participants are attending from overseas, Mr. Quigley declared that if some of these meetings could be held through telecommunications networks the savings would be substantial. In addition to this, the ability for COL to communicate through reliable channels to member countries, and for them to be able to communicate with COL headquarters, is critical to COL's success and an important aspect of its mandate.

Mr Quigley concluded his presentation by warning against the use of technology for "technology's sake", and by cautioning that before technologies are introduced, they should be affordable and appropriate to the situation, the necessary infrastructures for use and support should be present and the system must be sustainable.

Materials Acquisition and Development for Distance Education

Dr. Dennis Irvine, Director, Caribbean Programmes and Materials Acquisition and Development at COL, gave the next presentation. He discussed the acquisition of materials and their development, and a number of the challenges that COL faces when dealing within these areas. He pointed out that the rationale for founding COL was partly based on the premise that many distance education materials already exist that could be used by institutions and countries to expand access to, and improve the quality of education, and that COL's functions would be to evaluate them and then arrange for the transfer of the appropriate materials to the requesting bodies. However, it has not proved to be as straightforward as this, as a number of major issues have surfaced that need to be resolved. Examples of these issues are copyright concerns, commercial factors, the distinction not often made between materials and

courses, the use of materials as learning materials versus the use of them for reference, the "not made here" syndrome and the cultural factors (the need to separate process from product).

Dr. Irvine informed the gathering that COL is actively working towards developing policies to deal with many of these issues. As an example, he indicated that COL had recently commissioned a study on the idea of a "materials bank" in which countries could deposit materials and thereby obtain credit, or likewise "withdraw" materials and use the credit they have banked. In addition, the materials bank could have a "library" component in that the materials could be loaned out for a specific period of time, and part of the bank could also deal with the controversial credit transfer issue with which all institutions are concerned.

Professor Maraj added a few comments at the end of this presentation. He spoke about the possibility of lease rather than purchase agreements for materials, the fact that it is difficult for COL to purchase from countries that have not contributed to the core budget, the impossible situation that COL faces if it "makes a deal" with one country and cannot provide the same conditions to another country, and the reality that if Canadian-developed materials are used overseas, it is good for the Canadian profile.

Distance Education Networks

The final presentation of the first day consisted of speakers from three different networks, Contact North, Telemedicine and the Consortium - Distance Education Network (CREAD). Mr. Gerard Lafrenier, Director, Contact North, spoke first. He explained that Contact North is a truly collaborative project between four provincially-funded institutions. He described it as a distributed network that did not offer its own courses, but provided the infrastructure through which institutions could offer their courses.

Ms. Erin Keough, Co-Director of the Telemedicine Centre at Memorial University, spoke next on the evolution of this network which operates throughout Newfoundland at some 160 centres. She indicated that it had evolved as a consortium of users and expanded particularly within the professional areas. The network utilises video and audio-conferencing, and provides linkages between hospitals, colleges, community halls and schools. The network began in the health professional development area, and continues to provide education within this, as well as other areas.

Mr. Pierre Van Der Donckt, Executive Director of the Inter-American Organisation for Higher Education, spoke about CREAD, a network they are in the process of establishing for the purpose of expanding youth resources through distance education. CREAD is intended to be a regional inter-university network operating throughout the Americas. One of the first activities of this network is a research

project being carried out to diagnose the development and future prospects of distance education programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean, and to examine the possibilities for technical cooperation.

Group Reports - Day 2

To begin the second meeting day, Dr. Ian Mugridge of the Open Learning Agency provided a summary of the first day's presentations. He recapitulated the purpose of the meeting as being to review the work and mandate of COL, and of Canadian institutions and organisations involved with distance education, and to develop recommendations concerning ways that Canadian distance educators can provide practical help to COL and member states of the Commonwealth.

He then asked the meeting to divide into three groups to discuss the topics listed below, and to make recommendations to COL regarding issues of pertinence.

1. Materials for Distance Education
2. The Use of Technologies and Telecommunications in Distance Education
3. Infrastructures for Distance Education

The groups met, with a chairman and rapporteur appointed, to discuss the pertinent issues within their topics. As a result of the meetings, reports incorporating recommendations to COL were presented. The following is a summary of these reports.

Materials Group

The group that met to consider materials noted the complexity of the issues confronting COL in discharging its mandate in this regard. Major concerns identified were the growing tendency to treat educational materials as a commodity as well as the intractable problems of copyrights, which was particularly aggravated in the Canadian context. The group agreed that organisations like the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) and the ACCC could play an important role as information sources for COL particularly in advising or informing COL where Canadian institutions are involved in projects in Commonwealth countries upon which COL could capitalise. By way of illustration, if COL wanted to acquire Canadian materials and transfer them to an institution in a country where a Canadian institution was already operating, it would make qualitative sense to use materials and expertise from that institution, thereby ensuring rationalisation of resources.

Equally in the matter of copyright, since COL and organisations like AUCC and ACCC have a vested interest in securing a relaxation of the present copyright regime

in Canada, COL could lend its weight to supporting the efforts being made within this area.

The group suggested that associations like the AUCC and the ACCC should play a stronger role both in letting COL know where their members are working and in informing COL what materials are available.

The group made passing reference to the possibility of off-shore registration for external degrees by distance as an alternative to the transfer of materials from one country to another.

Recommendations

COL should help:

1. facilitate information exchange with Canadian organisations, institutions, agencies, etc. through the use of databases and other mechanisms (the sharing of information could lead to real cooperation); and

2. as much as possible in developing model copyright legislation and in encouraging it to be accepted.

Technology/Telecommunications Group

The Technology/Telecommunications group endorsed the policies being adopted by COL with respect to the use of technologies and telecommunications in distance education. They recommended that COL undertake an analysis of how to develop, implement and operate successfully a delivery system using various technologies, taking into account the complex non-technological factors that often influence such systems, such as the social/cultural context in which they are applied.

The group recognised the usefulness of the distinction which COL had made as regards the applications of technologies within distance education, namely:

1. the use of educational telecommunications;
2. the use of educational broadcasting;
3. the use of educational technologies for courseware delivery and for administrative purposes; and
4. the use of telecommunications technology within COL headquarters for communications purposes with outside agencies, organisations, institutions, etc.

Recommendations

COL should continue to:

1. place primary emphasis on the implementation of technologies to support the development of print materials, e.g. through desk-top publishing, and to support audio-conferencing;

2. document as much as possible existing telecommunications infrastructures in member countries; and

3. facilitate the expansion of telecommunications facilities outside of capital cities in member countries, by providing advice and assistance to local telecommunications firms regarding the suitability of various technologies which will support expansion of distance education.

In addition, COL should:

4. undertake the commissioning of a meta-analysis of reports, data and information that have been collected on Canadian experiences regarding successful and unsuccessful uses of technologies in various contexts. The outcomes from this analysis should become the basis for training programmes for distance education professionals. The training material should address technical and non-technical issues, as well as issues related to the creation and management of distance education programmes;

5. expand and implement its current initiatives to establish electronic mail and computer conferencing among professionals associated with COL initiatives;

6. explore the use of packet satellite or low-orbital satellite communications systems for regions which do not have reliable telephone service; and

7. endeavour to serve as a source of information for Canadians who are planning distance education projects which will involve a number of telecommunications carriers in member countries. These projects may need to address problems of incompatibility and legal or other restrictions, and COL could provide a valuable service as a source of information and advice.

Infrastructures for Distance Education

The group focusing on distance education infrastructures applauded COL for the initiative in convening the meeting in Sudbury which they regarded as unique in terms of representation. The group suggested that this consultative process should be on-going and that the participants should meet on a regular basis, possibly every two years. In addition, there should be mechanisms established for maintaining communications links among the participants. They also felt that it would be

extremely useful if there were to be an annual meeting of COL with Canadian distance educators which could take place immediately prior to or subsequent to the annual Canadian Association of Distance Educators (CADE) meeting. It would not be expected that COL would meet the costs, but the group felt that it would be a useful mechanism for the distance educators to be kept up-to-date on COL's activities and plans, and an effective means of soliciting and encouraging their cooperation.

It was noted that CADE is developing a human resources database and that this database should be shared with COL once it has been completed.

Recommendations

COL should:

1. convene an annual meeting held in Canada to which all Canadian distance educators are invited. This meeting must be established as an important meeting for distance educators, not just COL, and participants should be from associations, colleges, universities, government, private consortia, ministries, etc. as well as from COL;

2. recognise that as it is located in a Canadian city, and in the Canadian context in which all levels of distance education and endeavours are found, it should establish a Canadian desk which has as its main purpose maintaining communications between COL and Canadian distance educators;

3. assist in establishing liaison officers to represent distance education groups and institutions in Canada with whom COL has, or wishes to establish, a linkage. The officers would be responsible for informing COL of relevant activities in their groups or institutions;

4. design a communication strategy for the purpose of informing interested parties about COL's planned or implemented projects. COMLEARN, as well as electronic mail and computer conferencing, can be useful information and feedback vehicles; and

5. increase its profile by ensuring there are COL representatives at various distance education functions held in Canada and around the world.

Closing

Dr. Dennis Irvine summarised the proceedings of the meeting. He began by re-emphasising a number of points made by Professor Maraj in his opening remarks

and by others during their presentations on the first day. He then summarised the *group reports, and the recommendations made to COL with respect to future* activities and projects.

The meeting was formally closed by the Chairman, Dr. John Berry who expressed gratitude on behalf of the participants to the President of COL for convening this historic and useful meeting, and for the contribution that he and his colleagues made to the enhancement of the participants' knowledge of the organisation's philosophies, policies and programmes. He also expressed on behalf of the participants appreciation to Dr. Paul, Ms. Croft and their colleagues for hosting the meeting and for the warmth of the hospitality accorded. Finally he thanked the participants themselves for generously finding the time to participate in the meeting and for their frank, open and sincere contributions to the deliberations during the two-day meeting.

July 19, 1991

Canadian Distance Educators Meeting

Meeting Participants

Bernard, Dr. Anne	Canadian International Development Agency
Berry, Dr. John	Association of Universities/Colleges of Canada
Boak, Ms. Cathy	TV Ontario
Capon, Dr. Paul	Laurentian University
Clements, Mr. Ken	Canadian Association of Distance Education
Croft, Ms. Marian	Laurentian University
Derks, Ms. Pam	Cambrian College of Applied Arts/Technology
Dewson, Dr. Mike	Laurentian University
Griffin, Dr. Douglas	Training and Development Canada
House, Dr. Maxwell	Memorial University of Newfoundland
Keough, Ms. Erin M.	Memorial University of Newfoundland
Lafreniere, Mr. Gerard	Contact North
Leavens, Mr. Richard	CAUCE
Maclean, Mr. Bruce	Assoc. of Media & Tech. in Education
Mayer, Mr. Dennis	Laurentian University
McKinnon, Mr. Norman	Canadian Association of Distance Education
Mugridge, Dr. Ian	Open Learning Agency
Nash, Dr. Christine	Athabasca University
Norton, Mr. Tom	Association of Community Colleges of Canada

Patry, Mr. Pierre	Tele-Universite
Paul, Dr. Ross	Laurentian University
Roberge, Dr. Pierre	Laurentian University
Van Der Donckt, Mr. Pierre	CREAD
Waugh, Mr. Alex	University of Toronto
Wong, Dr. Angie	University of Saskatchewan

COL Participants

Maraj, Professor James A.	President & Chief Executive Officer
MacDonald, Honourable Flora	Special Adviser
Irvine, Dr. Dennis	Director, Caribbean Programmes & Materials Acquisition & Development
Quigley, Mr. John	Director, Technologies & Telecommunications
Phillips, Ms. Susan	Senior Programme Officer

AGENDA
Canadian Distance Educators Meeting

July 8

9:15 - 10:15	**Session 1** Chair - Ms Marian Croft Welcome to Laurentian and to the Meeting Prof James A Maraj Introduction to Meeting Overview of COL
10:15	**Coffee**
10:30 - 11:00	**Session 2** Chair - Prof James A Maraj Dr Ross Paul Distance Education: A Canadian Perspective
11:10 - 12:10	**Session 3** Chair - Hon Flora MacDonald Ms Marian Croft, Mr Tom Norton Perspectives on Distance Education in Canadian Universities, Colleges and Other Institutions
12:15	**Lunch**
1:45 - 2:15	**Session 4** Chair - Dr Douglas Griffin Mr John Quigley Technology and Telecommunications in Distance Education
2:25 - 2:55	**Session 5** Chair - Dr Anne Bernard Dr Dennis Irvine Creating, Producing Distance Education Materials - Copyrights, Material Bank
3:00	**Coffee**
3:15 - 4:30	**Session 6** Chair - Mr Norm McKinnon Mr Gerard Lafrenier, Ms Erin Keough, Mr Pierre Van Der Donckt Distance Education Networks as Delivery Systems
6:00 - 7:00	**Tour of Science North**
7:00	**Dinner**

July 9

9:00 - 9:30	**Session 7** Dr Ian Mugridge - Review of Previous Day's Acitivities Followed by Division into Three Groups: 1. Infrastructure for Distance Education in Canadian Universities/Colleges/Institutes 2. Materials for Distance Education - Creation, Delivery, Copyright, Production 3. Use of Technology/Telecommunications/Networks in Distance Education Mandate for Group Discussions and Reports
9:30 - 11:45	**Session 8** Group Discussions Group Report Preparation
12:00	**Lunch**
1:30 - 3:00	**Session 9** Chair - Dr Ian Mugridge Individual Group Reports
3:00 - 3:30	**Session 10** Chair - Dr John Berry Dr Dennis Irvine Summary and Recommendations
3:45	**Coffee**